

SENATE BILL 2867
By Fowler

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 6, Part 30, relative to excused absences for religious instruction.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 6, Part 30, is amended by adding the following language as a new, appropriately designated section:

Section _____. (a) A student with the written consent of his or her parents or guardian, or a student who has attained the age of majority, upon application of the student, may be excused from attendance in school in grades nine (9) through twelve (12) for a period of not more than one (1) class period, but not to exceed one (1) hour, during each school day to participate in religious instruction at his or her place of worship or at any other suitable place away from school property designated by the religious group, church, or denomination. Such religious instruction shall not be the responsibility of the local school board, nor shall such instruction be conducted on school property. Local school board permission shall not be granted unless the following conditions are met:

(1) The religious institution maintains weekly attendance records and makes them available to the public school each student attends.

(2) Transportation to and from religious instruction is the complete responsibility of the religious institution or parent or guardian of the student.

(3) Each school board specifies in advance its own requirements on liability involving students on released time, and the religious institution or parents or guardians meet those requirements.

(b) The principal shall reserve the right to refuse a student's request for released time if:

(1) The student is not enrolled in sufficient courses to allow for the student's promotion or graduation, and thus the released time would not be equivalent to an optional period.

(2) The student's grades are insufficient to allow for the student's promotion or graduation.

(c) Nothing in this section shall be construed to require school boards to permit religious instruction programs, nor to deny them the right to terminate an individual student's permission to attend a religious institution for nonattendance.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.

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